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NATURAL HERITAGE INSTITUTE ENDORSES BAY-DELTA STANDARDS AGREEMENT

The Natural Heritage Institute today gave its endorsement to a historic consensus agreement on environmental protections for the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary.

The three-year agreement commits the state and federal governments to implement a broad set of measures to protect the Bay-Delta environment, including requirements for water flows through the Delta, limits on water diversions, and limits on the number of winter run salmon and Delta smelt -- both endangered species -- that may be killed by the state and federal projects. In addition, a fund of approximately \$60 million per year will be created to bolster habitat conditions and to purchase supplemental water.

According to David Fullerton, a spokesman for the Natural Heritage Institute, "this agreement is basically a three-year trial marriage between the state and federal governments and between the environmental and water using communities. If we can make cooperation work, California's environment and economy will both benefit and we can begin to put the California water wars behind us. If we fail, it is back to the trenches with risks to all sides."

If the agreement holds together, the parties will begin to look at longer-range improvements in California's water system in 1995, including both the physical plumbing of the system and the rules by which water is stored and moved.

Says Fullerton, "First you stop the bleeding, then you worry about full recovery. This agreement, together with other ongoing efforts, is meant to halt the collapse of the Bay-Delta fisheries, including Chinook salmon, Delta smelt, Sacramento splittail, longfin smelt and a host of other species. If we can stabilize these species, then we can get to the fun stuff -- reforming California's antiquated water management system and really bringing back the fish."

The agreement is the first tangible fruit from a consensus effort between urban, agricultural, and environmental interests begun in 1991 with the so-called "Three Way Water Agreement Process and continued with the Governor's 1992 water policy and the 1994 state-federal framework agreement. The effort has not been easy. Says Fullerton, "there is a time for playing hardball and a time for cooperation. The natural tendency of all the players, whether environmental groups, water agencies, or the state and federal administrations is to seek unilateral gains and to posture for their constituencies. Sometimes that is needed. But long-term protection for California's environment and its economy are ultimately linked. You can't have one without the other. I congratulate the water users and Governor Wilson for sticking with the process despite great pressure to do otherwise."

The Natural Heritage Institute is a non profit environmental law firm specializing in California water management reform. NHI represents a large number of environmental organizations on Bay-Delta issues and was instrumental in negotiating today's agreement.

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